

## Is language learning a dying art?

The continued decline of modern language teaching and learning across the UK has been given much press coverage over the past five years.

With an official from the Department for Education admitting the government is "struggling hugely" with GCSE modern foreign language entries, and that the situation "getting worse", the position seems bleak.

According to provisional figures published by the Department for Education, only 46.1% of students took at least one language for GCSE in 2018, continuing a falling trend since 2014.

Despite a 3.6% rise in Spanish entries at GCSE, the number of students studying French and German continues to drop. Overall, the total number of MFL candidates has decreased by nearly 50,000 since 2014.

Over the past five years, entries to A Levels have also fallen significantly with a decline of 16.4% in French and 27.7% in German, confirms the Association for School and College Leavers.

But just what is it that's leading to this saddening situation? There have been a number of reasons cited for the falling number of linguists in schools. Some students simply don't perceive languages to be interesting or see them as too difficult.

Despite language skills frequently being advantageous in securing roles, many students also don't see the benefit in studying a language for their future career path. According to the recruitment website reed.co.uk, approximately 15% of all jobs posted cite language skills or a foreign tongue as being beneficial in helping secure a role.

These are all barriers to language uptake and are leading schools to commit less funding to language teaching and the curriculum.

In order to buck this trend and see a rise in entries at GCSE and A Level, the benefits of language learning must be better promoted, not only to students but to school leaders too. Without their buy in, it'll be a difficult task to gain the needed supply of language teachers and increased funding to maintain a broad curriculum.

There are countless benefits of learning a language and it's imperative that students and school leaders realise that it's so much more than simply translating words on a page. Languages hold the key to understanding other people and cultures.

Professor Neil Kenny, a lead Fellow for languages at the British Academy, is an advocate of studying languages, highlighting that it "gives people an adaptable, open, outward-looking mindset. It's a mindset that is not only in demand amongst employers but makes for good citizens, curious about the diversity of the world around them."

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